

# Clark County judge appointed to Court of Appeals

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Buy this photoClark County District Court Judge Richard Melnick was named to the state Court of Appeals. He will begin his new job March 10. ([Troy Wayrynen](#)/The Columbian)

Gov. Jay Inslee has appointed Clark County Superior Court Judge Rich Melnick to the state Court of Appeals.

Melnick, 58, of Hockinson will be the first Clark County resident to serve on the appellate court since October 2005, when Judge J. Dean Morgan retired.

“Judge Melnick’s distinguished career made him a standout choice for appointment to the Court of Appeals,” said Gov. Inslee in a statement Friday. “He has extensive experience as an appellate advocate, having appeared in our appellate courts in over 100 cases. He also has deep roots in Southwest Washington and will serve the community well.”

Melnick will succeed Division 2 appellate Judge Joel M. Penoyar of Pacific County, who is retiring Feb. 28. Melnick's term begins March 10.

"I'm excited, I'm honored, I'm humbled," Melnick said Friday in a phone interview.

He said he's also sad to be leaving his colleagues in Clark County.

"This is a great job here in the trial court," he said. "I can't say I was in any way unhappy here. I just think this is a good move for me."

Melnick was selected from a pool of three candidates, including Vancouver criminal attorney Mark Muenster and Longview appellate attorney John Hays.

In a Clark County Bar Association poll, 67.4 percent of 174 respondents said they also would choose Melnick for the appellate position. He also received the highest marks from respondents for legal ability, judicial temperament, integrity, relevant legal experience and relevant appellate experience.

"It's a great feeling because my peers recognized me," Melnick said.

As part of the selection process, the governor's general counsel, Nick Brown, interviewed him last week, and Gov. Inslee interviewed him earlier this week, Melnick said.

Melnick has been a Superior Court judge since February 2010. After graduating from Lewis & Clark Law School, he began his career in 1981 at the Clark County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. While a prosecutor, he headed the county's first Appellate Bureau. In 2004, he became a District Court judge and continued in that role until he joined the Superior Court bench. He also served on the municipal court bench in Camas and Washougal and has taught law at Clark College. He said he has a penchant for research, which is needed in appellate cases.

"Judge Rich Melnick is an experienced judge with a strong work ethic and dedication to public service," Chief Judge Lisa Worswick said in the statement Friday. "He is known as the go-to person when hard work needs to be done and will make an excellent addition to our court."

Off the bench, Melnick is known in local circles as the man who dishes out free Thanksgiving and Christmas meals at Chronis' Restaurant and Lounge in downtown Vancouver. He and restaurant owner Chuck Chronis have organized the events for more than 30 years.

Melnick's annual salary will be \$164,238. He will have to run for election in November if he draws a challenger, said Jaime Smith, a spokeswoman for Gov. Inslee.

It's unclear who will handle Melnick's cases in Clark County after March 10. Clark County Superior Court's presiding judge, Barbara Johnson, was not available for comment Friday.

The Division 2 court convenes in Tacoma, and Melnick will be required to travel there for hearings. He said he'd also like to spend some time with his new colleagues.

The division is made up of three districts. Two judges, Penoyar and Division 2 Acting Chief Justice Jill Johanson, who is from Cowlitz County, represent Southwest Washington's District 3. District 3 hears appeals from six counties: Clark, Cowlitz, Lewis, Pacific, Skamania and Wahkiakum.

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